"NATURE-VIVRE"

by

WILLIAM M. HARNETT

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS

APRIL 18 TO MAY 6, 1939

SPC
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1939

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INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM M. HARNETT

1848 - 1892

Although all other references to William M. Harnett list Philadelphia, 1851, as the place and date of his birth, I have accepted the authority of the late E. Taylor Snow, close friend of the artist and author of the biographical sketch which appeared in the catalogue of the Executrix's Sale held on February 23 and 24, 1893, in Philadelphia. A slightly condensed version follows:

"William Michael Harnett was born in Clonakilty, County Cork, Ireland, August 10, 1848, and was brought to America when but a year old. He was educated in Philadelphia. At the age of thirteen he sketched his first picture on a slate.

His father died when William was a small boy, and he was obliged to do something to help support his mother and small sisters. His first work was selling newspapers, after which he served as an errand boy. When seventeen years old he began to learn the engraver's trade and worked on steel, copper and wood, and finally developed skill in engraving silverware.

From his early youth, he showed great talent in drawing, and at the age of nineteen he entered the night class at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Two years later, he enrolled in the night class of the National Academy of Design, and the Cooper Institute in New York, meanwhile following his trade as engraver during the day. In 1875, he gave up his trade and devoted his entire time to painting.

One of his first compositions in oil was exhibited at the National Academy, New York, and sold. This was the first money he earned with his brush. In 1876, he returned to Philadelphia and opened a studio; he then exhibited at the Academy of Fine Arts and became a member of the Society of Artists. Soon after, a connoisseur from Munich bought one of his productions, the first example of his work to cross the water. It was in this studio that his larger and most noted pictures were produced. These passed into the hands of collectors as soon as finished.

In 1878 Mr. Harnett went to London and remained a few months, painting several pictures which were sold and also exhibited at the Royal Academy. He went to Frankfort and later to Munich which was his home for four years. In October, 1884, he went to Paris; it was there he painted his famous picture, 'After the Hunt', which was accepted at the Salon and reproduced by Enault in his book of forty pictures from the Salon. At the close of the exhibition he returned to New York with his triumph of art and opened a studio.

At this time, Mr. Harnett painted a 'Five Dollar Bill' for Theodore Stewart of New York. News of its existence reached the Secret Service Bureau of the Treasury Department whose agents seized it. When sent to Washington and examined by an expert, the picture was pronounced merely a painting in oil. The late Judge McClue, solicitor of the Treasury, decided it was a work of art, —not a counterfeit—and could not be confiscated. It was returned to Mr. Stewart, but Mr. Harnett was warned by the Secret Service authorities not to indulge his fancy in that direction again. Mr. Harnett always grouped his models so as to make an artistic composition—he endeavored to make the composition tell a story. Before painting he would make a finished lead-pencil

drawing, with minute details. Through hard study and years of toil, he achieved the highest fame in his line of painting, being recognized the most realistic painter of this age.

He died at the New York Hospital, October 29, 1892."

According to the exhibition records of the National Academy in New York, Harnett was represented with one or more paintings every year from 1875 to 1891 (with the exception of 1885, 1887 and 1890). The addresses on the entries are as follows:

1875-6-7-8 ..... 10 East 11 Street, New York City
(Harnett eivdently did not maintain a studio in Philadelphia more than a few months in 1876)
1879 ..... 400 Locust Street, Philadelphia
1880-1 ..... Frankfort, Germany
1882-3-4 ..... Munich, Germany
1886-8-9 ..... 28 East 14 Street, New York City
1891 ..... 42 West 30 Street, New York City

In addition to the National Academy, his work was exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts; at the Glastpalast, Munich; in Frankfort; at the Royal Academy in London; at the Salons and at the Societe des Arts Francais in Paris.

William M. Harnett's popularity was so great in the 1880's and 1890's, that his paintings fetched extremely high prices. EMBLEMS of PEACE (No. 12), was originally purchased for $10,000. A gallery label attached to OLD SCRAPS (No. 5) lists the price of $5,000.; and several Philadelphians recall similar figures for other examples by this artist. It seems strange, therefore, that such fame as Harnett achieved during his brief career as a painter should have rapidly subsided. Less than fifty years after his death, Harnett is now being introduced as a re-discovery.

While his recognition in the nineteenth century may have been due to his "artistic composition" and his reputation as "the most realistic painter of his age", our present interest in Harnett is based on more contemporary considerations. We marvel at the fact that he anticipated a style practiced today by the vanguard in France and in this country. His color is brilliant, the painting flawless, and the composition organized in abstract pattern. But it is Harnett's combination of meticulous realism with an arbitrary juxtaposition of unrelated objects that may be said to provide a link between Dutch art of the seventeenth century and sur-realism of the twentieth. The contemporary school of imaginative realism is enriched by another American ancestor presented in this exhibition.

—EDITH GREGOR HALPERT

No. 1

FRUIT

oil on canvas — size 12" x 14"
signed lower right W M Harnett 1877

may be the painting exhibited at the
National Academy in 1877, under that title

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

OLD FRIENDS

oil on Academy board — size 9¼" x 6"
signed lower right W M Harnett

Philadelphia label on back suggests
residence there, and date of 1879

No. 2

No. 4

OLD REMINISCENCES

oil on canvas — size 25" x 30"
signed lower right W M Harnett

address on envelope, "Locust Street", Philadelphia
suggests date of picture 1879-1880

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

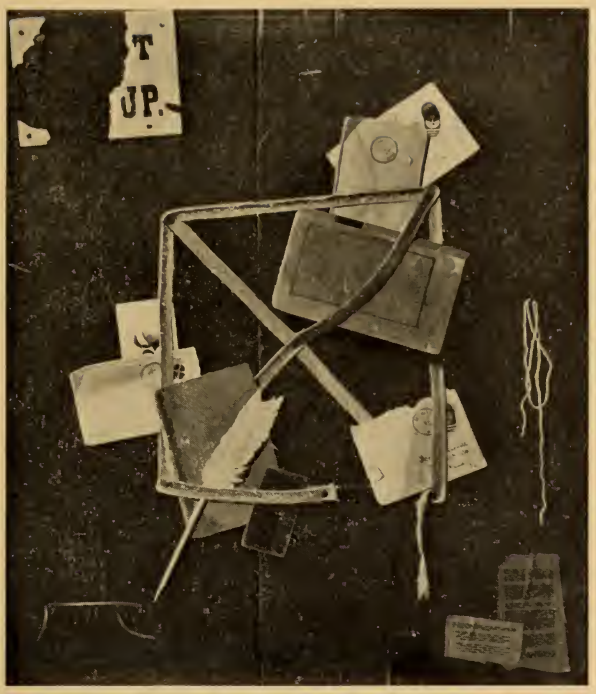
Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

OLD BOOKS

oil on Academy board — size 9¼" x 6"
signed lower right W M Harnett

no indication of date appears on this painting;
may be 1878-1879

No. 3



No. 5

OLD SCRAPS

oil on canvas — size 25" x 30"
signed lower right W M Harnett

address on envelope, "Locust Street", Philadelphia
suggests date of picture 1879-1880

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

WITH THE N. Y. TIMES

oil on canvas — size 8½" x 5¾"
signed lower right W M Harnett 1880

The New York Times is also dated 1880.
Harnett lived in Frankfort that year

No. 6

No. 8

OLD SOUVENIRS

oil on canvas — size 22" x 27"
signed lower center W M Harnett 1881

The Philadelphia Bulletin is also dated 1881.
Harnett lived in Munich from 1881 to 1884

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

WITH THE N. Y. HERALD

oil on canvas — size 16" x 12"
signed lower right W M Harnett 1880

The New York Herald is also dated 1880.
Harnett lived in Frankfort that year

No. 7

No. 9

THE OLD VIOLIN

oil on canvas — size 24" x 38"
name appears on letter W M Harnett

Postmark date (1886) and address (28 East 14 St.)
on letter indicate date of picture, 1886

Collection: Mr. CHARLES F. WILLIAMS, Cincinnati, Ohio

Collection: THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY, New York

AFTER NIGHT'S STUDY

oil on canvas — size 20" x 14"
signed lower right W M Harnett

no indication of date appears on picture
may be 1888

No. 10

No. 13

THE FAITHFUL COLT

oil on canvas — size 19" x 23¼"
signed lower left W M Harnett 1890

this painting was exhibited in the American Exhibition
at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1938

Collection: WADSWORTH ATHENEUM, Hartford, Conn.

No. 12

EMBLEMS OF PEACE

oil on canvas — size 33¾" x 27½"
signed lower left W M Harnett 1890

Presented to the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts
in 1938 by Charles T. and Emilie Shean

Collection: SPRINGFIELD MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, Mass.

CATALOGUE

1 . . . . . FRUIT

2 . . . . . OLD FRIENDS

3 . . . . . OLD BOOKS

4 . . . . . OLD REMINISCENCES

5 . . . . . OLD SCRAPS

6 . . . . . WITH THE N. Y. TIMES

7 . . . . . WITH THE N. Y. HERALD

8 . . . . . OLD SOUVENIRS

9 . . . . . THE OLD VIOLIN
lent by Mr. Charles F. Williams, courtesy of the Cincinnati Art Museum

10 . . . . . AFTER NIGHT'S STUDY

11 . . . . . DISCARDED TREASURES

12 . . . . . EMBLEMS OF PEACE
lent by the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts

13 . . . . . THE FAITHFUL COLT
lent by the Wadsworth Atheneum

14 . . . . . STILL LIFE WITH VIOLIN
(Chromo-lithograph by F. Tuchfarber after the painting of W M Harnett), lent by the Whitney Museum of American Art

No. 11 illustrated on cover: Oil on canvas — size 40" x 20"; signed lower right W M Harnett — date (?) 1889.

THE DOWNTOWN GALLERY

EDITH GREGOR HALPERT, DIRECTOR

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O'KEEFFE
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CIKOVSKY
COLEMAN
DICKINSON
GOLDTHWAITE
HART
SCHMIDT
VARIAN

CERAMICS BY CARL WALTERS

TWELVE YOUNGER AMERICAN ARTISTS

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GUGLIELMI . . . KAZ . . . LEVINE . . . . LEWANDOWSKI
PANDOLFINI . . . PRESTOPINO . . . STEIG . . . STENVALL

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